Addressing Low Speaking Proficiency in EFL Students: The Impact of Integrated Teaching Strategies in an Islamic Education Setting

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to address the challenges of low speaking proficiency and motivation among second-year students in an Islamic education university department. This was achieved by implementing an integrated teaching strategy within a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework to enhance students' speaking skills and active involvement in the learning process. The study employed a CAR design, conducted over two cycles. Each cycle comprised four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The intervention involved an integrated teaching strategy that combined multiple language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—within a cohesive instructional framework. Data were collected through post-tests, observation checklists, and reflection notes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The results demonstrated significant improvements in both speaking performance and student engagement between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. In Cycle 1, the majority of students scored in the "Fair" category, with only 24.39% achieving "Good" scores. Following strategic adjustments, Cycle 2 saw a marked increase in average post-test scores, with 87.80% of students meeting or exceeding the success criteria. The level of active involvement also rose significantly, reflecting the effectiveness of the revised integrated strategy. The findings highlight the value of integrated language instruction and the importance of iterative refinement in teaching methodologies. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of language acquisition and offers practical insights for EFL educators, particularly in contexts where students face challenges in developing speaking proficiency. The study underscores the need for creating supportive and engaging learning environments that foster student participation and language development.

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of integrated teaching strategies in EFL contexts, particularly within Islamic education settings. It demonstrates how Classroom Action Research can be utilized to improve teaching practices and student outcomes continuously. The research offers a model that can be adapted and applied in similar educational contexts to enhance language learning.

Introduction

In the teaching-learning process, several key factors determine the quality of education: the teacher, the students, the curriculum, the facilities, and the environment (Xu et al., 2024). Among these, the teacher's role is particularly critical, encompassing mastery of subject matter, application of effective teaching methods and strategies, and maintaining a positive attitude and responsibility. Students contribute their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, attitudes, and the influence of their surroundings. The curriculum involves planning, syllabus design, teaching methods, approaches, and assessment strategies, while facilities include teaching media and support systems (Halil et al., 2024: Iskandar et al., 2024). This study focuses on the teacher's role, particularly in managing the language teaching process through the implementation of effective methods, strategies, and approaches. The relationship between the teacher and teaching strategies is inherently interdependent, as effective strategies can only be realized through skilled teaching.

In Indonesia, many students, from primary school through university, face challenges in mastering English, particularly in speaking skills (Saragih et al., 2024). This deficiency is often linked to the ineffectiveness of the teaching methods and techniques employed by teachers, which fail to achieve the desired instructional objectives. As a result, students struggle to speak English proficiently, reflecting a gap between teaching practices and learning outcomes (Laila et al., 2023).

In response to these challenges, numerous educational experts and practitioners have attempted to innovate and develop new methods and techniques for English language teaching (Anburaj et al., 2014; Paragae, 2023). These approaches are continually tested across various student levels and contexts. Among the potential strategies is the integrated strategy, which involves teaching all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—along with language components such as grammar and vocabulary within a single instructional session. This strategy aims to optimize instructional time by integrating multiple language aspects, thereby enhancing efficiency.

However, the successful implementation of an integrated strategy is challenging and requires a professional and skilled teacher. Such a teacher must not only master a range of teaching strategies but also be capable of stimulating active student participation. In particular, students need to be motivated and empowered to develop fluency and effectiveness in speaking, which is a primary focus of this study. The concept of language competence, as defined in linguistic theory, refers to a person's knowledge of language rules, enabling them to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences and recognize grammatical errors and ambiguities (Crystal, 1985). In the context of speaking, language competence is closely related to communicative competence, which includes not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts.

Harmer (1992) & Buarqoub (2019) argue that effective language use requires an appreciation of how language is utilized in communication, highlighting that mastering language competence alone is insufficient. Communicative competence, as outlined by Canale and Swain (in Cahyono, 1997), consists of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies, all of which are essential for effective speaking. Therefore, improving students' speaking skills necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses all aspects of communicative competence.

Speaking is an inherently interactive process that involves the production, reception, and processing of information through oral communication. Misunderstandings in speaking often arise due to deficiencies in the speaker's language abilities or the listener's comprehension skills. Given the importance of speaking as a productive language skill (Nurhayati et al., 2016), this study aims to explore how an integrated strategy can enhance students' English-speaking performance. The integrated strategy is particularly relevant in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where language instruction is tailored to students' fields of study. In this case, the focus is on English for Islamic Studies, reflecting the specific needs of students of Indonesian State Universities (Handayani et al., 2022).

The study's objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated strategy in improving students' speaking skills within this specialized context. Preliminary observations have indicated that previous teaching methods, characterized by conventional approaches, have not yielded satisfactory results. Consequently, this research seeks to implement and assess a more innovative approach, integrating all language skills into a cohesive strategy that can better support students' language development. By addressing the shortcomings of previous methods and offering a more holistic approach to language instruction, this research aspires to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve English language education in Indonesia.

Literature review

Addressing challenges in EFL speaking skills: The integrated strategy framework

Recent research on EFL learners' speaking skills has highlighted significant challenges that extend beyond mere language proficiency (Robah & Anggrisia, 2023; Yessenbekova, 2024). These challenges include psychological barriers, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, which often hinder fluency and create a cycle of limited language use. Additionally, the research emphasizes the impact of environmental factors (Laila et al., 2023), particularly the nature of interactions with teachers and peers, which can either support or impede the development of speaking skills. Acknowledging and addressing these complex dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance EFL students' speaking abilities.

To address these challenges, an updated integrated strategy framework has been developed. This framework is designed to create a supportive, non-judgmental learning environment that fosters active participation and reduces psychological barriers. The strategy integrates the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—along with essential language components such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar into a cohesive learning experience (Alhawiti, 2023). The framework emphasizes the importance of engaging students in practical, communicative activities that are directly relevant to their academic and professional interests.

The integrated strategy begins by dividing students into small groups, allowing them to select topics related to their field of study. Through a series of structured activities, including reading, discussion, summary writing, concept mapping, and group presentations, students are encouraged to engage deeply with the material and with each other. The framework prioritizes a non-judgmental approach during speaking activities, allowing students to practice and improve without fear of immediate correction, which has been shown to reduce anxiety and build confidence.

Furthermore, the strategy includes specific interventions to enhance vocabulary and pronunciation skills, as well as the practical application of grammar in speaking contexts. By integrating these language components into the broader framework, the strategy ensures that students develop a well-rounded proficiency that supports their ability to communicate effectively.

In addition to classroom activities, the framework also advocates for the establishment of regular speaking clubs and extracurricular activities. These provide students with additional opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive, real-world context, further reinforcing the skills developed in the classroom. By creating an immersive environment that encourages active participation, these activities help students overcome psychological barriers and build the fluency necessary for successful communication in English.

This study is expected to contribute significantly to the field of EFL education by providing a practical, evidence-based approach to improving speaking skills. It offers a novel solution that integrates both linguistic and psychological aspects of language learning, addressing the specific needs of EFL students in a way that traditional methods have failed to achieve. The findings from this research could have broader implications for EFL teaching practices, particularly in contexts where students face similar challenges in developing speaking proficiency.

Research method

Research design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, a well-established methodology in educational research aimed at addressing specific issues within the teaching-learning process by implementing and refining interventions iteratively. CAR is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for continuous assessment and improvement of teaching strategies, thus ensuring that the interventions are directly responsive to the needs of the students (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The cyclical nature of CAR, involving planning, action, observation, and reflection, facilitates a systematic approach to enhancing teaching practices and student outcomes.

Participants

The participants in this study were 41 second-year students enrolled in an Islamic education university department. These students were selected based on their enrollment in courses that required the development of speaking skills in English, particularly within the context of English for Islamic Studies. The selection was purposive, ensuring that the participants represented a group that was directly impacted by the issues the research sought to address—namely, low proficiency in spoken English and low motivation for learning the language.

Research setting

The study was conducted in the context of an English language course designed for students specializing in Islamic Education. The course content was tailored to meet the specific linguistic needs of these students, focusing on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) related to their field of study. The classroom environment was a traditional university setting, with classes held in a typical lecture room equipped with basic teaching aids such as a whiteboard, audio-visual equipment, and instructional materials relevant to the course.

Intervention: Integrated strategy

The intervention implemented in this study was an integrated teaching strategy designed to improve students' speaking skills by combining multiple language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—within a single instructional framework. This approach is grounded in the theory of Integrated Language Teaching, which posits that language skills are interdependent and should be taught in an integrated manner to enhance overall language competence (Richards &

Rodgers, 2001). The strategy also emphasized active student involvement and the creation of a supportive learning environment, which are critical factors in language acquisition (Krashen, 1982).

Data collection methods

Data for this study were collected using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness. To assess students' speaking performance, post-tests were administered at the end of each cycle. The tests were designed to evaluate key aspects of speaking proficiency, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and the ability to use language appropriately in context. The tests were scored using a standardized rubric, with scores ranging from 0 to 100, and were analyzed to determine whether the students met the predefined success criteria. While an observation checklist was employed to systematically record students' active involvement during the teaching sessions for the qualitative analysis. This checklist was designed to capture various dimensions of participation, including frequency of contributions, engagement with peers, and responsiveness to teacher prompts. A collaborator, who served as an observer, completed the checklist during each session, ensuring that the data were collected objectively and consistently. Furthermore, we maintained detailed reflection notes throughout the study, documenting insights and observations that emerged during each cycle. These notes were used to guide the iterative refinement of the teaching strategy, ensuring that adjustments were based on real-time feedback and the specific needs of the students.

Research procedure

The research was conducted over two cycles, with each cycle comprising four key stages: planning, action (implementation), observation, and reflection. Each cycle included four instructional meetings, each lasting 90 minutes.

Table 1. Research procedure cycle

Cycle 1	Planning: During the planning stage of Cycle 1, we prepared the integrated strategy, instructional materials, and assessment tools. This stage also involved setting up the criteria for success, which included achieving an average post-test score of 80 or higher and reaching a minimum active involvement rate of 70%.
	Action: The integrated strategy was implemented in four consecutive sessions. We delivered the lessons according to the pre-designed lesson plans, with a focus on integrating speaking with other language skills.
	Observation: The collaborator observed each session, using the observation checklist to record student participation and engagement. The post-test was administered at the end of the cycle.
	Reflection: Following Cycle 1, we and the collaborator reflected on the results, analyzing the post-test scores and observation data. The findings from this reflection informed the adjustments made in Cycle 2.
Cycle 2	Planning: Based on the reflections from Cycle 1, the strategy was refined to address identified weaknesses, such as the need for more engaging activities and clearer instructions to enhance student participation.

	Action: The refined strategy was implemented in Cycle 2, again over four sessions. Additional techniques, such as pair work and role-plays, were incorporated to foster greater interaction and practical language use.
	Observation: The observation process was repeated, with the collaborator again using the checklist to document student involvement. A post-test was administered at the end of Cycle 2 to evaluate the impact of the refined strategy.
	Reflection: The final reflection stage involved a comprehensive analysis of the data from both cycles, comparing the results to determine the effectiveness of the intervention and drawing conclusions about its impact on student learning outcomes.

Data analysis

The data collected were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of the intervention's impact. The post-test scores were analysed using descriptive statistics to calculate means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test and post-test scores across the two cycles, determining whether the improvements were statistically significant. The analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The qualitative data from observation checklists and reflection notes were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved coding the data to identify recurring themes related to student engagement, participation, and the effectiveness of the teaching strategies. The themes were then interpreted in the context of existing literature on language acquisition and teaching methodologies.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the research process. The study also adhered to institutional guidelines for ethical research, including obtaining approval from the relevant ethics committee at the University.

Results

This classroom action research (CAR) aimed to address and resolve the challenges faced by second-year students at the Islamic Education Department of STAIN Ternate, specifically focusing on their low English-speaking skills and motivation in learning English. To tackle these issues, we implemented an integrated teaching strategy designed to enhance students' speaking abilities. This section presents the findings from the two cycles of CAR, analyzing both students' speaking performance and their active involvement during the learning process.

In this study, the implementation of an *integrated strategy* each cycle consisted of four meetings, and each meeting takes 90 minutes. The results were analyzed in two parts, namely *post-test* results in speaking performance and the classroom atmosphere showing the students' active involvement and participation to measure their motivation and curiosity in learning English. The *post-test* results were collected by employing test items in oral forms and scored by using a *test scoring guide*. Their active involvement and participation were assessed and scored by using an *observation sheet (observation checklist)* done by the collaborator.

Cycle 1
Speaking performance
        In Cycle 1, the students' speaking performance was evaluated through a post-test conducted after four instructional meetings. The results, as outlined in Tables 2 and 3, indicate that most students scored below the success criteria, with an average score of 75.45. The breakdown of scores is as follows:

Table 2. The Recapitulation of test results of students' speaking performance in cycle 1

No.	Range of Scores	Classification	Total of Students
1	96 – 100	Excellent	0
2	86 – 95	very good	0
3	80 – 85	Good	10
4	65 – 79	Fair	31
5	54 – 64	Weak	0
6	0 – 53	Unacceptable	0
Average Score			75.45
The Total of Successful Students			10
The Total of Unsuccessful Students			31
The Highest Score of the Students			84.50
The Lowest Score of the Students			65

Table 3. The score description of the students' speaking performance in cycle 1

Level of Score	Ideal Score	Obtained Score
Maximum Score	100	84.50
Minimum Score	100	65.00

        The tables above indicate that the students got low scores because the average scores of the students were 75.45 consisting of only 10 (ten) students gained 80-85 categorized as "good" scores, 31 (thirty-one) students obtained 65-79 categorized as "good" scores "fair", and no student obtained 86-95 categorized as "very good". Overall, the highest score achieved in this cycle was 84.50, and the lowest was 65.00. These results suggest that the students' speaking performance did not meet the minimum standard of 80, as required by the success criteria.
        In addition to the students' test results shown above, we displayed the following table indicating the recapitulation of their active involvement and participation.

Active involvement
        Student engagement during Cycle 1 was assessed using an observation checklist. The results, summarized in Table 4, show the following levels of active involvement across the four meetings:

Table 4. Recapitulation of the students' active involvement in cycle 1

No	Activities	Score of Students' Active Involvement			
		Maximum Point	Total Point Earned	Percentage (%)	Average (%)
1	First Meeting	287	154	53.66	63.68
2	Second Meeting	287	165	62.37	

| 3 | Third Meeting | 287 | 189 | 65.85 |
| 4 | Fourth Meeting | 287 | 209 | 72.82 |

Category: Mid

The average active involvement was 63.68%, categorized as "Mid," which did not meet the criteria for success. Although there was a gradual improvement in involvement, the overall engagement level was insufficient to consider the cycle successful.

Reflection on cycle 1

Following the analysis of the data, which focused on the students' post-test results in speaking performance and their level of active involvement during classroom activities, the final step in this cycle of the classroom action research (CAR) was the reflection phase. This reflection process involved synthesizing, analyzing, and aligning the outcomes of the students' speaking performance after the implementation of the integrated strategy in Cycle 1 with the established criteria for success. The reflection considered both the scores from the oral tests and the levels of active participation, as documented through observation checklists completed by the collaborator.

The analysis revealed that the majority of students scored below the expected standards. The average student scores did not meet the minimum benchmark of 80, as stipulated by the success criteria. Specifically, only 10 out of 41 students (24.39%) achieved scores within the "Good" range (80-85). None of the students attained the "Very Good" range (86-95). After calculating and averaging the scores, it was evident that the overall performance did not reach the required threshold of 80.

Nearly all students scored below 80, with 31 students (75.61%) falling into the "Fair" category (65-79), and only 10 students (24.39%) reaching the "Good" category (80-85). This indicates that the students' results did not meet the criteria for success. Furthermore, the students' level of active involvement also failed to meet the success criteria. The following figures illustrate the percentage distribution of the students' scores in Cycle 1, highlighting both post-test results and levels of active involvement.

The data from Cycle 1 revealed that the integrated strategy did not achieve the desired outcomes in speaking performance or active involvement. The students' average scores were below the 80-point threshold, and their engagement was not high enough to meet the criteria of success. Therefore, we decided to revise the teaching approach and proceed to Cycle 2, aiming for better results.
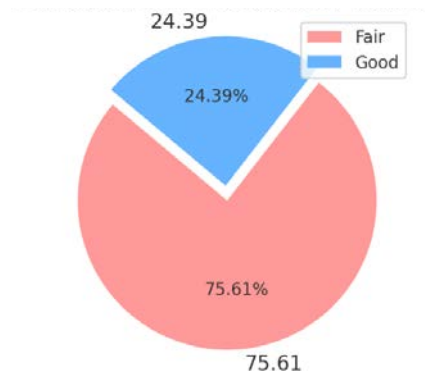

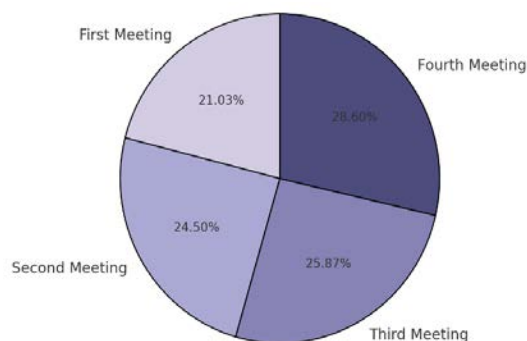Figure 1. The percentage of students' scores in speaking performance in cycle 1

Figure 2. The percentage of students' scores of active involvement in cycle 1

Cycle 2
Speaking performance
Because the students' speaking performance in cycle 1 was unsuccessful, the implementation of the *integrated strategy* was continued to cycle 2. Cycle 2 showed significant improvement in students' speaking performance. As presented in Tables 5 and 6:

Table 5. The recapitulation of students' test results in cycle 2

No.	Range of Scores	Classification	Total of Students
1	96 – 100	Excellent	0
2	86 – 95	very good	5
3	80 – 85	Good	31
4	65 – 79	Fair	5
5	54 – 64	Weak	0
6	0 – 53	Unacceptable	0
Average Score			82.54
The Total of Successful Students			36
The Total of Unsuccessful Students			5
The Highest Score of the Students			91
The Lowest Score of the Students			76.50

Table 6. The score description of the students' speaking performance in cycle 2

Level of Score	Ideal Score	Obtained Score
Maximum Score	100	91
Minimum Score	100	76.50

The average score rose to 82.54, with the highest score at 91.00 and the lowest at 76.50. These results indicate that the students' speaking performance met the criteria of success, showing a significant shift towards higher proficiency levels.

Active involvement
The observation data for Cycle 2, detailed in Table 7, reflected a substantial increase in student engagement:

Table 7. Recapitulation of the students' active involvement in cycle 2

No	Activities	Score of Students' Active Involvement			
		Maximum Point	Total Point Earned	Percentage (%)	Average (%)
1	First Meeting	287	219	76.31	
2	Second Meeting	287	217	75.61	79.71
3	Third Meeting	287	230	80.14	
4	Fourth Meeting	287	249	86.76	

The average active involvement reached 79.71%, which met the criteria for success, demonstrating a positive response to the revised instructional strategies.

Reflection on cycle 2
The findings from Cycle 2 suggest that the revised integrated strategy was successful in improving both students' speaking performance and active involvement. The average speaking score improved from 75.45 in Cycle 1 to 82.54 in Cycle 2, with a corresponding rise in active participation from 63.68% to 79.71%. This improvement highlights the effectiveness of the modifications made after Cycle 1, indicating that the integrated strategy is a viable approach to enhancing speaking skills among EFL students. The following figures describe the whole percentages of the students' scores in cycle 2.
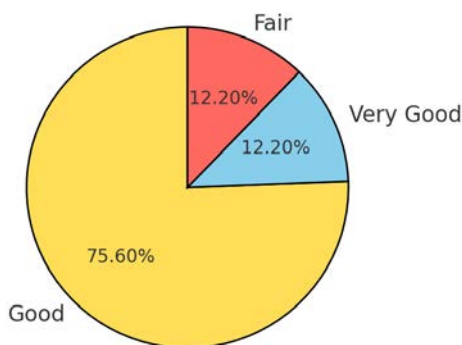
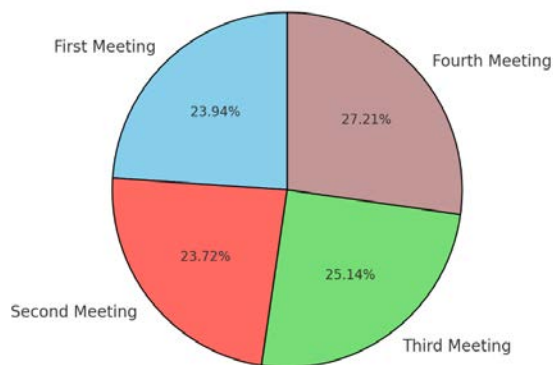Figure 3. The percentage of students' scores in speaking performance in cycle 2

Figure 4. The percentage of students' scores of active involvement in cycle 2

The tables and figures above indicate that the implementation of the integrated strategy in Cycle 2 was successful. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the students' speaking performance met the criteria for success, as evidenced by both the post-test results and their active involvement during the teaching and learning process, as observed by the collaborator.

The analysis of the students' speaking performance, encompassing both post-test results and active involvement, revealed that the research had to be conducted in two cycles. The results from Cycle 1 did not meet the criteria for success and were therefore categorized as a "failure," necessitating a continuation of the strategy into Cycle 2.

The post-test results from Cycle 1 showed that none of the students achieved the highest classification of 96-100 (classified as "Excellent"), and none scored within the 86-95 range (classified as "Very Good"). Only 10 out of 41 students (24.39%) achieved scores in the "Good" range (80-85). The majority, 75.61% of students, scored below 80, falling into the "Fair" category (65-79). Notably, no students received scores in the "Weak" (54-64) or "Unacceptable" (0-53) categories.

In addition to the post-test results, the students' active involvement, as recorded through observation sheets, also served as an indicator of the strategy's success. During the first meeting of Cycle 1, only 53.66% of students were actively involved, a level categorized as "Mid." This initial meeting was predominantly led by the lecturer. The second meeting saw a slight increase in active involvement to 62.37%, which remained in the "Mid" category, indicating that the criteria for success were still not met, and the meeting could not be categorized as "successful." In the third meeting, students' active involvement rose to 65.85%, but this too fell into the "Mid" category, failing to meet the success criteria. The fourth meeting showed further improvement, with 72.82% of students actively involved, which did meet the criteria for success. However, the overall average percentage for Cycle 1 was only 63.68%, below the minimum standard of 70% required by the criteria for success, leading to the judgment that the cycle was not successful.

After revising the plan following Cycle 1, the strategy was re-implemented in Cycle 2. Following four meetings during Cycle 2, we conducted a reflection and analysis of the integrated strategy's implementation. The results, derived from both the students' scores on the spoken test and their active involvement as recorded on observation checklists by the collaborator, indicated significant improvement.

The students' scores from the spoken test in Cycle 2 showed substantial improvement compared to Cycle 1. The average scores increased, with the minimum standard of 80 (classified as "Good") being achieved, as required by the criteria for success. Additionally, the average percentage of active involvement also improved, reaching 71% (classified as "High") based on the success criteria. Despite the significant improvements observed in Cycle 2, no student achieved the "Excellent" level. The highest score obtained was 91 (classified as "Very Good"), while the lowest score was 76.50 (classified as "Fair"). Most students fell into the "Good" category, with scores ranging from 80 to 85.

The recapitulation of students' test results in Cycle 2 reveals that 5 out of 41 students (12.20%) achieved a "Very Good" level (86-95), while 31 students (75.61%) attained a "Good" level (80-85). Only 5 students (12.20%) were categorized as "Fair." The dominant percentage, 75.61%, was classified as "Good." In summary, it can be concluded that the implementation of the integrated strategy in teaching speaking to students at the Islamic Education Department of STAIN Ternate during the 2013-2014 academic year was successful, and the strategy was deemed effective.

The improvement in students' performance was clearly demonstrated by the increase in average post-test scores, from 75.45 in Cycle 1 (with the lowest score of 65.00 and the highest of 84.50) to 82.54 in Cycle 2 (with the lowest score of 76.50 and the highest of 91.00). The number of successful students also rose from 10 out of 41 (24.39%) in Cycle 1, where all were in the "Good" category, to 36 out of 41 (87.80%) in Cycle 2, with 31 students (75.61%) in the "Good" category and 5 students (12.20%) in the "Very Good" category. Consequently, the number of unsuccessful students decreased significantly from 31 (75.61%) in Cycle 1 to just 5 (12.20%) in Cycle 2.

Active involvement during the teaching and learning process also improved, increasing from an average of 63.68% in Cycle 1 (with 53.66% in the first meeting, 62.37% in the second, 65.85% in the third, and 72.82% in the fourth) to 79.71% in Cycle 2 (with 76.31% in the first meeting, 75.61% in the second, 80.14% in the third, and 86.76% in the fourth).

Discussion

The results of this study clearly indicate that the integrated strategy implemented in the classroom action research (CAR) was effective in improving the speaking performance and active involvement of second-year students in an Islamic education university department. The data from both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 highlight a marked improvement in the students' speaking skills, as evidenced by the increase in post-test scores and enhanced levels of active participation during classroom activities.

In Cycle 1, the students' performance was generally low, with the majority of students scoring in the "Fair" category and a significant portion failing to reach the minimum success criteria. The average post-test score of 75.45 was below the acceptable standard of 80, and only 24.39% of students managed to achieve scores in the "Good" category. This outcome suggests that while the integrated strategy had some positive effects, it was not sufficient to meet the desired educational objectives at this stage. Moreover, the low level of active involvement, as indicated by an average participation rate of 63.68%, further underscores the need for strategic adjustments to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

The transition to Cycle 2 saw significant improvements, with the average post-test score rising to 82.54, and a substantial increase in the proportion of students achieving "Good" and "Very Good" scores. Specifically, 87.80% of students in Cycle 2 achieved scores that met or exceeded the minimum success criteria, compared to only 24.39% in Cycle 1. Additionally, the level of active involvement improved markedly, with an average participation rate of 79.71%. These results not only demonstrate the effectiveness of the revised integrated strategy but also highlight the importance of iterative refinement in teaching methodologies to address specific learning challenges.

The significant improvement observed in Cycle 2 can be attributed to several key factors. First, the iterative nature of CAR allowed us to refine the teaching strategy based on the insights gained from Cycle 1. This iterative process aligns with the principles of action research, which emphasize the importance of continuous improvement through cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). By adapting the teaching approach to better meet the needs of the students, we were able to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Second, the integrated strategy employed in this study focused on enhancing multiple language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—in a cohesive manner. This holistic approach is supported by language acquisition theories that emphasize the interdependence of

language skills (Nation & Newton, 2009). By integrating these skills, the strategy not only improved the students' speaking abilities but also reinforced their overall language competence, making them more confident and capable communicators.

Furthermore, the emphasis on creating a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment likely contributed to the increased levels of student participation and engagement. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, learners' emotional states can significantly impact their ability to acquire a second language. A low-anxiety environment, where students feel safe to make mistakes and take risks, can lower the affective filter and facilitate more effective language learning. The improvements in Cycle 2 suggest that the adjustments made to the teaching strategy helped to reduce students' anxiety, thereby enhancing their willingness to participate actively and improve their speaking skills.

The objectives of this study were to improve the speaking performance and active involvement of EFL students through the implementation of an integrated strategy. The results obtained from the two cycles of CAR demonstrate that these objectives were largely achieved, particularly in Cycle 2. The substantial increase in both post-test scores and participation rates indicates that the integrated strategy was successful in addressing the initial challenges identified in Cycle 1. It is also important to note that the success of the strategy in Cycle 2 is consistent with the broader literature on EFL teaching methodologies. Studies have shown that integrated language instruction, which combines the teaching of multiple language skills, can be more effective than isolated skill instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Callahan et al., 2009; Abdelhafez, 2024). The findings of this study align with this research, suggesting that the integrated strategy not only improved students' speaking abilities but also contributed to their overall language development.

Implications of the study

The findings of this study have several important impacts for EFL teaching, particularly in the context of higher education in Indonesia. First, the success of the integrated strategy underscores the value of holistic language instruction that addresses multiple skills simultaneously. This approach can be particularly beneficial in settings where students struggle with speaking proficiency, as it provides them with a more comprehensive language learning experience.

Second, the study highlights the importance of creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment. The significant improvements in student participation and speaking performance observed in Cycle 2 suggest that when students feel encouraged and supported, they are more likely to engage actively in the learning process and achieve better outcomes. This finding is consistent with research on the role of motivation and affective factors in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). EFL teachers should therefore consider incorporating strategies that foster a positive classroom atmosphere, such as providing constructive feedback, encouraging peer support, and allowing students to take risks without fear of judgment.

Finally, the iterative nature of CAR demonstrated in this study highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in teaching. The ability to reflect on and adjust teaching strategies in response to student needs is crucial for achieving effective learning outcomes. This study provides a practical example of how CAR can be used to enhance teaching practices and improve student performance in EFL settings.

While the findings of this study are promising, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of 41 students, all of whom were from the same academic department. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could explore the effectiveness of the integrated strategy

in different educational settings and with larger, more diverse student populations. Second, the study focused primarily on quantitative measures of speaking performance and active involvement. While these measures provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the strategy, they do not capture the full range of student experiences and perceptions. Future research could incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of how students perceive the integrated strategy and its impact on their language learning. Finally, while the study demonstrated the effectiveness of the integrated strategy in improving speaking performance, it did not explore the long-term sustainability of these improvements. Future research could investigate the oral feedback (Ibrahin et al., 2023; Ramdan et al., 2024) and whether the gains observed in this study are maintained over time and whether students continue to develop their speaking skills after the intervention has ended

Conclusion

This study sought to address the persistent challenge of low speaking proficiency and motivation among second-year EFL students in an Islamic education university department. By implementing an integrated teaching strategy through Classroom Action Research (CAR), the research aimed to enhance the students' speaking skills and active involvement in the learning process. The effectiveness of this strategy was evaluated across two cycles of CAR, with the goal of determining whether iterative refinements could lead to significant improvements in both linguistic competence and classroom engagement.

The findings of this study demonstrated a clear improvement in students' speaking performance and active involvement between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. Initially, Cycle 1 revealed that the students' speaking proficiency did not meet the established criteria for success, with the majority scoring within the "Fair" range and only a small percentage achieving "Good" score. Furthermore, active participation was limited, suggesting that the initial implementation of the integrated strategy was insufficient.

However, the strategic adjustments made in Cycle 2 resulted in substantial improvements. The average post-test scores increased significantly, with the majority of students moving into the "Good" and "Very Good" categories. Additionally, student engagement rose markedly, as evidenced by higher levels of active involvement during classroom activities. These results underscore the effectiveness of the integrated strategy when applied in a supportive and iterative manner.

The research successfully answered the central questions posed at the outset of the study. Specifically, the findings confirmed that the integrated strategy, when refined and adapted based on student feedback and performance, effectively improved the speaking skills of EFL students. The strategy also enhanced their active involvement, which is crucial for language acquisition. The iterative nature of the CAR approach allowed for continuous improvement, ultimately leading to the achievement of the research objectives.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader field of EFL education, particularly in contexts similar to Islamic ESP, where students often struggle with speaking proficiency (Handayani et al., 2022; Asrianti & Reskyani, 2022). The study highlights the value of an integrated approach that combines multiple language skills and fosters a supportive learning environment. This research not only provides a practical solution to a common challenge in EFL instruction but also contributes to the theoretical understanding of how integrated strategies can be effectively implemented to enhance language learning outcomes.

The implications of this study are both practical and theoretical. Practically, the findings suggest that EFL educators should consider adopting integrated teaching strategies that focus on holistic language development and actively involve students in the learning process. Such strategies can be particularly beneficial in settings where students face challenges in developing speaking proficiency (Alek & Nguyen, 2023; Husnia et al., 2023). Theoretically, the research supports the idea that iterative refinement, as facilitated by CAR, is essential for effective teaching. The study also reinforces the importance of creating a low-anxiety, supportive classroom environment to improve language acquisition, as suggested by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.

While this study provides valuable insights, it also opens up avenues for future research. One area that warrants further investigation is the long-term impact of the integrated strategy on students' speaking proficiency. Future studies could explore whether the improvements observed in this research are sustained over time and whether similar strategies could be effective in different educational contexts. Additionally, qualitative research could provide deeper insights into students' perceptions of the integrated strategy and its impact on their language learning experiences. Overall, this study provides meaningful insights into the potential of integrated teaching strategies to transform EFL education by enhancing both speaking proficiency and student engagement. By embracing a reflective, iterative approach to teaching, educators can better meet the needs of their students and foster a more effective and enjoyable language learning experience (Meldawati & Hamid, 2023; Suhardi et al., 2023). The journey of continuous improvement in education is crucial, and this research highlights the importance of adapting teaching methodologies to create meaningful and lasting learning outcomes.

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